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The Feminine Current In The Golden Dawn

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Many Wiccans and Pagans, whilst declaring themselves "eclectic" seem to avoid the Golden Dawn like the plague. This is quite understandable, since on the face of it the GD seems to be counter to most of the Pagan philosophies. (The open hostilities and down putting directed at Wiccans that pour out of some GD practitioners does not help the matter either.)

The GD Is often viewed as inflexible, patriarchal, authoritarian and stuck up its own behind. A few Wiccans do practice the GD, but most of these, I feel do so with the belief that the two are watertight compartments - that is Wicca is a religion and the GD a "system". Most (including myself), if they confide in you will admit that they view the GD as more "powerful" - at least in the magical as opposed to the religious sense.

It is my aim here to show that the essence of the GD is not inherently patriarchal and opposed to Pagan ideology. This I believe can be readily observed if we remember that the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn was a late 19th century outward manifestation of a spiritual system eons old. The essence of the system would therefore be contained within, but not altered by, and outward form that reflected late 19th century western occult ideology. (Remember also that the GD first emerged via Masonic sources and thus the outer form was heavily colored by that system.) This essence can however be readily "tapped into". This will then help the magician avoid being trapped into "believing" the GD's outer form. The essence I speak of is, of course, the Goddess.

On the face of it to say that the GD's essence is Goddess sounds absurd. But please do not judge the GD book by its cover. Forget the outer form, forget the Victorian pomposity, forget the props. Let's go a little deeper.

First off, the original GD System relied heavily on its ceremonial initiations. The process of initiation (even the mimicry of ritual initiation) always involves a death and re-birth, which can only truly occur via Goddess, since only the "female" force of the universe can give birth. Thus straight-away we see that at the core of the GD is an unrecognized Goddess force. To deny it is to say that either, a) the GD initiations do not involve a re-birth; b) something other than Goddess can give birth; or c) the GD initiations are not effective, which anyone who has undergone them will heartily dispute.

Christopher S Hyatt, the main collaborator with the late Israel Regardie before his death, in a recent book - The Secrets of Western Tantra - makes several hints which echo the views I express. Says Hyatt, when tracing the link between the GD and the Tantric Goddess:

> "...one attribute among many others which gives the whole show away is the equality between male and female adepts." (p.69)

For a Masonically derived Order in Victorian England this was an unprecedented and daring move. Yet this had to, and did occur, since the Order's essence is based firmly on Goddess and the co-equality of the sexes. Looking a little more closely at the formation of the Order will also show many other clues regarding the hidden Goddess essence.

Firstly, the leading light of the Order, S L MacGregor Mathers, was an ardent supporter of the equality of the sexes and the young feminist movement. In his introduction to "The Kabbalah Unveiled" he sets the record straight concerning the nature of divinity:

> "...the translators of the Bible have crowded out and smoothed up every reference to the fact that Divinity is both masculine and feminine...now we hear much of the Father and the Son, but we hear nothing of the Mother in the ordinary religions of the day." Presuming the hidden Goddess essence and following the mythology of the Order, it becomes apparent why the "Secret Chiefs" chose such a person to lead the GD. If the Order's essence was patriarchal they would surely have chosen a different man.

Continuing with the examination we find that the Outer Order rituals are based upon a set of cipher manuscripts. In those manuscripts, as published in "The Secret Inner Order Rituals of the Golden Dawn", we find the candidate is often referred to as "she". In an age when women were still calling themselves "brothers" and "chairmen", this is significant.

Further, the Order was chartered and given authority (i.e., symbolic life) by a woman (Sr SDA). Now admittedly serious doubt has been cast upon this history, but regardless of whether the events occurred in shared space-time or Westcott's mind, the symbolism is important - it is a symbolic birth performed by a Goddess figure.

This theme is further developed in the naming of the first true GD temple in England (and the initial temple of many GD Orders worldwide) as the Isis-Urania temple. Thus the Order is visibly dedicated to, and under the influence of, the Goddess. Behind all things, even GD temples, is the Mother.

Before having a quick flick through Regardie's "The Golden Dawn" to see what Goddess essence we can find there, let's pay attention to some of the more prominent protégés of the Order. Firstly Mathers himself went on to utilize his GD adeptship to develop, along with his wife Moina, the Rites of Isis in Paris (the couple nearly always worked as a partnership in their occult work.) Secondly Aleister Crowley, despite his male ego, misogyny and viciousness went on to produce a sort of Nuit "cult", using GD based techniques. Crowley himself is an excellent example of my point that inner essences do not necessarily reflect outer forms and vice versa. It is hard to imagine that such a person as Crowley (the man) could act as medium to such Goddess inspired beauty as the closing paragraphs of the first chapter of Liber Al vel Legis. Yet Goddess came forth anyway. Crowley, like the GD was outwardly patriarchal, but contained the essence of Goddess. There is no more Goddess inspired theology than Crowley's maxim, "Do what Thou wilt shall be the whole of the Law".

Dion Fortune, initiate of the Stella Matutina, also used GD based techniques to help formulate her Pagan workings, the focus of which was the Goddess Isis.

The most obvious evidence of Goddess in the GD is the Rose-Cross, the symbol of the combined female and male forces. The GD's Inner Order, the Rosae Rubeae et Aureae Crucis claimed a Rosicrucian lineage, and the links between the Rosicrucians and Goddess have been detailed beautifully by Gareth Knight in his book, "The Rose Cross and the Goddess".

We come then to the GD tarot, and find it restoring the court cards to an equal sexual balance based upon the Tetragrammaton. The male knave (page) of the exoteric packs of the era was correctly replaced by the female princess, symbolic of the Earth Goddess.

In Qabalistic philosophy we find the spirit of the Divine often referred to as Shekinah, which is seen as having a female essence. This is shown clearly by Mathers when he correctly translates a passage from the Sepher Yetzirah:

> "...AChTh RVCh ALHIM ChIIM: Achath (feminine, not Achad, masculine) Ruach Elohim Chiim; One is She the Spirit of the Elohim of Life."

This theology is followed in the GD. Israel Regardie shows this in his ritual for Spiritual Advancement, which is based firmly upon the Z documents of the Inner Order. Here he implores the Mother of Goddesses and Gods (Aima Elohim) to aid him in his quest. Regardie even uses a cauldron as a symbol of the Great Mother. This, believe it or not, is not a Wiccan ritual, but pure Golden Dawn.

The main weapon of the RR et AC adept, the Lotus Wand, has embodied within it much Goddess essence. It is described as, "...a simple wand surmounted by the lotus flower of Isis. It symbolizes the development of creation." (The Golden Dawn, 5th ed. p224.) This indicates that the creation of the Spirit, the Heavens and the Earth comes from the Great Mother Isis. The wand also represents the Kundalini - a feminine Goddess force. This to me is a beautiful tool, alive with Goddess, much more so than the Wiccan athame (which is objected to by some feminist Witches as being aggressive and masculine).

Finally let us return to initiations. The two most important initiations of the GD/RR et AC system, the Neophyte and the Adeptus Minor ceremonies, both contain the hidden Goddess essence.

The Neophyte ceremony is based on the myth of the Slain and Risen Osiris, where the candidate acts as the Slain Osiris. This myth however is a later patriarchal rendition of the Ishtar and earlier Innana myth of Goddess descending into the Underworld. The Goddess is thus present deep within the archetypal theme of the ceremony. Further, the act that seals the initiation proper, the final consecration, is conducted by Officers representing "the Goddesses of the Scale of the Balance". And as the badge of the grade is placed upon the new initiate, "...it is as the two Great Goddesses Isis and Nepthys, stretched forth their wings over Osiris (the initiate) to restore him again to life." The candidate is thus re-born to a fuller life by the power of Goddess.

The Adeptus Minor ceremony contains much Goddess essence quite openly. The clearest example of this is the Vault of the Adepti, and obvious symbol of the Womb of Goddess. As Regardie briefly points out in his introduction to the Golden Dawn, the candidate is led through the Twin Pillars which symbolize the vagina and into the womb itself. There she returns to the Great Mother and is re-born and out through the vagina once more. The symbolism is so obvious, so beautiful and so potent, and I am surprised some Wiccan/Pagan group hasn't adapted the ceremony in their own workings.

From the foregoing it can easily be seen that Goddess is alive and well within the GD - at least in its essence. Sadly not many GD adepts are aware of this. Most GD magicians get too caught up in the outer form and potency of the system to notice where the energy and beauty originate. I am not claiming that the GD is, or should be, a religion. It is not, and its essence is not. The essence is however Goddess and Her continuing manifestation in this world. If we are to remember and consciously perceive this it will transform our GD work. Then the GD will no longer be "dry" and without life - the perceptions most Wiccans and natural Goddess worshippers intuitively feel.

For 100 years the Golden Dawn has concealed Her, the Mother of Light, Life and Love. But now in this time when She is being worshipped by so many in so many different ways, the Golden Dawn will at last reveal its secret. And just as the Stone that the Builders rejected shall become the Cornerstone of the Temple, so too shall Goddess become the key to the 21st century manifestations of what is now the Golden Dawn. The new Golden Dawn shall one day become as important as the Wiccan movement in the collective invocation of Goddess. This process is already beginning, and we can all take part in and promote it if we Will. But whether we chose to or not, now is the time to bury the false split between ceremonial and Pagan magic, for both are born of the Mother and both will lead us back to her.

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